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# SCIENCE

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## CONTENTS

<i>National Academies and the Progress of Research:</i> DR. GEORGE ELLERY HALE .....	189
<i>The Plan of Work in Connection with a New Marine Laboratory on the Pacific:</i> WILLIAM A. HILTON .....	200
<i>Winslow Upton:</i> PROFESSOR R. C. ARCHIBALD.	202
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i> .....	204
<i>University and Educational News</i> .....	207
<i>Discussion and Correspondence:—</i>	
<i>What was the Cause of the Eskers:</i> COL. JOHN MILLIS. <i>Matter and Memory:</i> DR. WILLARD J. FISHER. <i>Lag and Lead with a Braun Tube:</i> JOHN FRED. MOHLER. <i>Ichthyosaurian Remains in the Benton Cretaceous:</i> CHARLES W. GILMORE. <i>A Misnamed Portrait of John Shaw Billings:</i> PROFESSOR BURT G. WILDER. )	208
<i>Scientific Books:—</i>	
<i>Zeeman's Researches in Magneto-optics:</i> PROFESSOR ARTHUR S. KING. <i>Geikie on Mountains, their Origin, Growth and Decay:</i> PROFESSOR JOHN J. STEVENSON. <i>Rock on the Indigenous Trees of the Hawaiian Islands:</i> PROFESSOR CHARLES E. BESSEY. <i>Lankester's Science from an Easy Chair:</i> PROFESSOR T. D. A. COCKERELL .....	211
<i>Special Articles:—</i>	
<i>A Note on Sex Determination:</i> PROFESSOR G. H. PARKER .....	215
<i>The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology:</i> PROFESSOR A. J. CARLSON .....	217
<i>The American Society of Biological Chemists:</i> DR. P. A. SHAFFER .....	218
<i>The American Association of Economic Entomologists:</i> A. F. BURGESS .....	220
<i>The American Philosophical Society:</i> PROFESSOR E. G. SPAULDING .....	221
<i>The Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology:</i> PROFESSOR W. C. RUEDIGER....	222
<i>Societies and Academies:—</i>	
<i>The Anthropological Society of Washington:</i> DR. DANIEL FOLKMAR. <i>The Entomological Society of Washington.</i> <i>The Philosophical Society of the University of Virginia:</i> DR. L. G. HOXTON. <i>The Science Club of the University of Wisconsin:</i> DR. ERIC R. MILLER .....	

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## NATIONAL ACADEMIES AND THE PROGRESS OF RESEARCH<sup>1</sup>

### II. THE FIRST HALF CENTURY OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

IN the days preceding the American Revolution, the Royal Society was to this country what it still is to the existing British Colonies: the central and authoritative representative of scientific research.<sup>2</sup> Americans eminent for their contributions to science were elected Fellows, and their papers appeared in the *Philosophical Transactions*. The list of colonial Fellows includes Cotton Mather, Bowdoin, Dudley, and the three Winthrops in New England; Franklin, Rittenhouse and Morgan in Pennsylvania; Banister, Clayton, Mitchell and Bird, in Virginia, and Garden and Williamson in the Carolinas. But so distant a body could not meet all local needs. Thus Franklin, active in every field, undertook the organization of the American Philosophical Society in 1743, some years before its time, as its early demise proved. In 1766 the American Society held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge was established and Franklin, then in Europe, was elected its first president. In the meantime the earlier society was revived, and

<sup>1</sup> For most of the material in the following pages the writer is indebted to a history of the "First Half Century of the National Academy of Sciences," prepared and edited by Frederick W. True in connection with the recent celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the academy.

<sup>2</sup> See an excellent article by G. Browne Goode, from which the data used in the introduction of the present paper are taken: "The Origin of the National Scientific and Educational Institutions of the United States," Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1889.